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Appropriations Committee Public Hearing, Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Testimony on the Governor's Bill 5037 on the state budget ending 6/30/23

Testimony in support of 5049 – Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Fund by Rep. Turco, Sen Winfield et al

Thank you members of the Appropriations Committee. I'm John McNamara, a member of the Congress of CT Community College, 4Cs Local 1973. I worked for 22 years until this month as Capital Community College's grants and development officer.

I urge the committee to increase appropriations for the community college system so long as funds are earmarked for the campuses and to ensure services are not reduced because of consolidation costs. The Board of Regents needs be more transparent, and the Legislature needs to do more oversight to ensure the funds you appropriate go directly to classrooms and campuses.

While its positive the Governor has included \$64 million for state colleges and universities with continuing tuition help to deal with pandemic hardships. It's also positive that the state used new funds to up appropriations for two-year schools in 2021. But this followed years of rescissions and austerity that have fallen on the community colleges more than other units of public higher education. The block grant proposing \$158,563,093 does not address the situation on the ground now: serious under staffing of direct student services, fewer and fewer full-time faculty and the elimination of local resources and personnel needed for enrollment and outreach. I'm told that Capital Community College's deficit, for example, is upwards of \$7 million because of pandemic related enrollment drops and, unfortunately, because current budget allocations are being made for a one-college bureaucracy and the "Connecticut State Community College" that is supposed to take effect in 2023.

The Board of Regents is also moving to increase tuition in the coming year. A \$224 increase may not seem like much, but it can be a deal breaker for many part time students not getting federal or institutional aid who are balancing work and study to get ahead. The Legislature should at the very least provide for funds that would freeze tuitions and fees as we slowly recover from the pandemic.

With that in mind I urge approval of HB 5049 by Rep. Turco that would restore funds and provide \$62 million for the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Fund that has served many financially disadvantaged part time and full-time students when it is fully funded.

Thank you.